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A Cryptic Answer

George Bush, the chief of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), gave what one must call a cryptic answer to a question in San Francisco.

"No, we couldn't do that," Bush replied when asked if the United States could duplicate the dramatic Israeli rescue of the hijacked Air France passengers in Uganda.

Bush said that the United States does have what he termed "a very important role in furnishing intelligence to policy makers and our friends on the movement of international terrorists," but he added, "to indicate that we have that kind of action capability in these times, the answer is very frankly no."

It occurs to us that Bush answered the question the way he did because he had to. It wouldn't do to proclaim to the world that this superpower could and would be as bold and daring as the government in Jerusalem. It is better to understate an answer, or deflect it by assuming the questioner meant the capability of the CIA itself rather than the government.

The United States could do what is necessary to rescue nationals from a group of terrorists if the conditions permitted such a coup, as in the case of the Israelis' 2,400 mile flight from Israel to Uganda. Israel

directed its efforts against terrorists located in a Third World Country. Different circumstances might find the United States confronted with a difficult situation in an industrial nation of the Free World or the Communist sphere. The same tactics could not apply in such a case. But other bold means, including diplomatic ones, could be used.

The world's free superpower doesn't have quite the freedom or latitude in which to act that a smaller nation does. This country's efforts to stop airline hijacking have been highly successful. Other nations could follow the United States' example.

Bush believes one of the major values of the intelligence produced by his agency is to fight terrorism. He said "the more the American people understand this, the more support the CIA will have."

Meantime, President Gerald Ford and his James Bond type (Bush) and other advisers shouldn't rule out the use of imagination and daring to cope with impossible crises posed by terrorists. Both the Free and Communist worlds must reduce the menace of terrorism. Appropriate, forthright action is worth 10,000 words.